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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 001784

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SUBJECT: A/S FRAZER AND PM MELES TALK ERITREAN/ETHIOPIAN
BORDER AND SUDAN

Classified By: Classified By: A/S Jendayi Frazer for reasons
1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) Summary: On June 25, Prime Minister Meles and Dr. Frazer along with Charge and Admiral Hunt reviewed the Eritrean/Ethiopian talks and the road ahead. Frazer argued that progress had been made and that Ethiopia had been more flexible than Eritrea. Although the initial proposal to involve General Fulford in EEBC demarcation discussion had been rejected by the EEBC, there is still the possibility of parallel talks on normalization while the EEBC demarcation process proceeds. Meles said that he preferred to quickly close this chapter and move on. He would like the US to remain engaged for the day when Isaias was ready to climb down. Frazer said that could illicit sanctions from the UN on both parties and it would be better to proceed by having the UN call for normalization talks. Meles said he would attend normalization talks but doubted that Isaias would do so. Frazer encouraged Ethiopian cooperation on the AMIS transition to UN and on opening political space domestically. End Summary.

12. (C) Dr. Frazer opened her remarks by pointed out that the USG is concerned about Eritrea arming the Islamic Courts. In fact, the USG is surprised that Eritrea would arm Islamists. "Perhaps this is an example of the enemy of my enemy is my friend." she said. "What does the alignment of Eritrea and Sudan mean?" Frazer asked Meles. Frazer said that she wanted to raise these issues because it impacts whether the border dispute can be settled. In her view, Ethiopia doesn't like the decision of the EEBC and Eritrea is unwilling to deal with the people on the border. Frazer said that she had hoped to encourage dialogue and build confidence between the two parties in technical talks to resolve issues from the impact of demarcation on the physical and human geography. However, Meles had warned her in their previous meeting that resolution of the dispute would not work that way; since both Isaias and Meles will make a strategic decision and all will flow from that, not confidence building. Nevertheless, there have been two EEBC meetings and some progress. Although the USG was not supportive of holding the June 15 meeting the EEBC had insisted. Frazer said that Eritrea had become increasingly concerned about the role of General Fulford. Unfortunately, the Eritrean legal counsel had spun up the EEBC commissioners by turning over a private e-mail between herself and General Fulford and this had contributed to the EEBC backing away from a role for Fulford. We did not envision changing the delimitation line rather we wanted to talk about how the people involved would be impacted by it. Currently, Eritrea was using this excuse to refuse to be party to seeking a solution because they claimed that the terms of reference had changed.

13. (C) Frazer then outlined how she envisioned we might move forward saying, "My team wants to go forward." The USG could appoint a DOS geographer to the EEBC to look at the border who could probably talk about the physical geography and manifest impracticality. At the same time the USG through the UN would seek parallel talks on the impact of demarcation on human geography and broader normalization issues. Frazer said that although this solution appears to offer a possible road forward, she doubted that Isaias would accept parallel talks. However, if Isaias refuses the normalization talks then the USG would have done its best and at that point return the border issue to the UNSYG. Frazer told Meles that he had asked her for a special condition in order to move the process forward, but that she never saw Isaias. Rather Isaias was increasingly abusive of our ambassador and our policies. Frazer said that at this point she doubted that Isaias wants the border demarcated as it would take away a weapon to use against Ethiopia. Ethiopia had been flexible. It had attended the EEBC meetings sending a representative from the capital rather than just sending its legal counsel as Eritrea had done. Ethiopia had also dropped publicly the insistence on saying that delimitation and demarcation were final and binding "in principle". But still that was not far enough, both sides were culpable, but Eritrea more so than Ethiopia in this phase of seeking a solution to the impasse.

14. (C) Meles responded that he considers it counter-productive to proceed with the EEBC. He believes that it would be better to close this chapter quickly. Still Ethiopia is concerned about what might replace the EEBC as Isaias at some point may need a ladder to climb down. Meles said that he did not want a Somalia-like situation in which the USG left for good. Rather he preferred that the USG would make a policy choice that allowed it to close this

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chapter but return if needed. The USG should not be concerned because Ethiopia will not be provoked into a war with Eritrea, Meles said. Frazer replied, that while she was inclined to believe that there would not be a war, the fact is that the international community would likely want to sanction both countries for failure to demarcate the border. Meles countered that sanctions that bite would not be an arms embargo as both countries have sufficient arms. Rather sanctions would create irritation and divert energy. In any case, in Meles' view, "If the Americans don't take the initiative this won't happen."

15. (C) Dr. Frazer said that both parties are responsible for the EEBC's failure. Ethiopia because it disagrees with the decision and Eritrea because of its maximal position. But still we need a process that builds peace. Frazer pointed out that although Isaias was unlikely to agree to the parallel talks her proposal envisions that talks on border demarcation would not be completed prior to the beginning of talks sponsored by the UN on normalization. Meles responded that Ethiopia is prepared to permit demarcation to begin on the Eastern border but there could not be preparations for demarcation on the disputed border because the EEBC President had stated that the demarcation line was the same as the delimitation line. Although it might be possible to start with the Eastern boundary with the expectation that normalization talks would be finished before arriving at the disputed area. But Isaias will not agree to this publicly, but Meles would attend normalization talks if asked. Frazer pointed out that in Ethiopia's favor is the decision of the EEBC that nothing is final until everything is decided.

16. (C) Dr. Frazer reviewed the USG and international communities' efforts to stabilize Sudan and the critical importance of an AMIS transition to a UN Peace Force. She explained that the U.S. will help build up AMIS and provide assistance to improve its capacity and ability to protect the civilian population. AMIS lacks the capacity and resources to complete the task, she said. She asked that Ethiopia support

the UN transition. Meles replied that there is no way around a UN operation. Bashir is objecting to a UN force because deep down he is worried about the ICC. I don't think the legal approach is compatible to convince the Sudanese, he advised. We need to think in terms of the bottom line as Sudan will only respond if their concerns are addressed. More worrisome to Sudan than UN are NATO troops due to historical reasons. The issue of NATO is particularly sensitive in North Africa. The AU does not want a North-South, Muslim-Non-Muslim divide. Ethiopia would remain true to its principles. It had always supported the SPLA even when Ethiopia reconciled with Sudan. Eritrea, however, would remain true to its tactic and not to principles and engage in side deals with Sudan. Frazer said that the US considers Ethiopia a strategic partner and that she is concerned by the new relationship between Eritrea and Sudan.

17. (C) Although Eritrea plays a spoiler role it is seen more favorably in the U.S. Congress than Ethiopia because the diaspora keeps the focus on the many Ethiopians in detention. The whole region could be destabilized by insurgencies and interests supported by Eritrea in Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia, Frazer pointed out. At the same time it is important for Ethiopia as a stabilizing force to open political space at home. Meles responded that the pressure would not build up and cork pop out of the bottle as Frazer feared. Rather he claimed that pressure is not building up in Ethiopia. There is no fundamental threat to Ethiopia's stability as the basis of EPRDF's support is in the rural areas. Isaias won't be successful in his support to insurgencies in Ethiopia.

18. (U) This cable has been cleared by AF Assistant Secretary Jendayi Frazer.

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